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MONTHLY REVIEW

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REVIEW OF THE MONTH

1949—Konni Zilliacus

ART AND SOCIALISM—Robert D. Feild

EUGENE V. DEBS: UNCOMPROMISING REVOLUTIONARY
Leo Huberman

WHY I BELIEVE IN SOCIALISM—John S. Jenkins

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NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

The statistics on which we base our analysis of the economic situation in this month's Review of the Month come from two valuable official sources which should be better known in the left-wing movement. These are (1) *Survey of Current Business*, published monthly by the Department of Commerce; and (2) *Economic Indicators*, prepared every month by the President's Council of Economic Advisers for the Joint Congressional Committee on the Economic Report. (Both can be obtained from the Government Printing Office, the former for \$3 a year or 25c a single copy; the latter for \$1.75 a year or 15c a single copy.) The *Survey*, containing voluminous statistics and detailed reports, is indispensable for the expert. *Economic Indicators*, covering a wide range of data by means of both charts and tables, is a model of clear

(continued on inside back cover)

ECONOMIC RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

Complete economic returns on 1949 are not in at the time of writing; but judged by data relating to the first three quarters, which are probably a reliable guide to the twelve-month period and which have the merit of avoiding the distortions caused by the long strikes in coal and steel in October, the year as a whole was one of marked recession as compared to 1948, the peak year of the postwar boom.

The Federal Reserve index of industrial production reached its postwar high of 195 (1935-39=100) in October and November of 1948 and then declined month by month to a low of 161 in July, 1949, subsequently recovering to approximately the June level.

Unemployment showed a similar trend. The official figure (which understates the actual amount of unemployment) rose from 1.6 million in October 1948 to over 4 million in July 1949 and then fell back to an average of approximately 3.5 million for the next two months.

Thus as regards these two key features of the capitalist economy—industrial production and unemployment—the picture was one of a sharp recession followed by a slight recovery which nowhere near made up for the ground that had been lost.

Overall figures for the entire national economy, such as gross national product and national income, were much more stable. Gross national product (equal to total consumption plus total investment with no deduction being made for depreciation of existing capital) fell only from \$270 billion in the last quarter of 1948 to \$256 billion in the third quarter of 1949; while the corresponding fall in national income (equal to the sum of all personal incomes plus undistributed corporate profits) was from \$234 billion to \$219 billion.

The different behavior of these two sets of figures is easily accounted for. Production and employment declined largely because businessmen not only stopped adding to their inventories but actually began to sell off part of what they had accumulated in the years since the war. During the last quarter of 1948, they added to inventories at an annual rate of \$9 billion; while during the third quarter of 1949, they liquidated inventories at an annual rate of \$2.4 billion—which means a net decline in demand for goods of \$11.4 billion per annum between the two periods. This is enough to account for a sharp drop in production and employment which, in turn, might normally be expected to have further repercussions on consumption

and production and hence to show up in the overall figures in a multiplied form. But other things were happening at the same time. In particular, governments—federal, state, and local—were spending more and taking in less. During 1948, they took in \$8.4 billion more than they paid out; while during the first three quarters of 1949, they paid out at a rate of \$3.4 billion more than they took in—which means a net increase in the nation's purchasing power of well over \$12 billion figured on an annual basis.

Hence we can say that, as far as the overall figures are concerned, a change from government surpluses to government deficits more than offset the change from accumulation of business inventories to liquidation of business inventories.

This leaves the relatively small declines in gross national product and national income to be accounted for by a number of factors, among which the following are of greatest importance: a fall in farm incomes due to declining agricultural prices, a drop in business investment in plant and equipment, and a decrease in foreign investment.

In sum, then, the recession of 1949 was heavily concentrated in the fields of industry and agriculture but, largely because of government spending, did not engulf the whole economy in a general depression. There is nothing in this record for the champions of private enterprise to be proud of. As usual, while boasting of the performance of their horse, they were surreptitiously administering increasing doses of dope to keep it from falling flat on its face.

But at any rate—if we may be allowed to carry the metaphor one stage further—there is no doubt that the hopped-up old nag paid off handsomely during the year. It was certainly not the capitalists, and especially not the big corporate capitalists, that suffered from the recession of 1949.

A quick glance at the statistics might tend to belie this judgment. Were not corporate profits (before taxes) at an all-time high of \$34.8 billion in 1948, and did they not drop sharply to an annual rate of \$26 billion by the third quarter of 1949? And if, by way of comparison, your income were cut from \$35 a week to \$26 a week, wouldn't you think that you had suffered?

But wait a minute. In the first place, we need to make what the statisticians call an inventory valuation adjustment. We won't try to explain this here, but we do have to point out that it is precisely the apologists for Big Business who recently have been most insistent on the necessity for this adjustment if a true picture of profits is to be obtained. With this adjustment, total profits in 1948 work out at \$32.6 billion, while the average annual rate for the first three quarters of 1949 was \$30.8 billion.

And now comes the clincher. Taxes are calculated on unad-

justed profits. On this basis, the corporate tax liability for 1948 was \$13.6 billion, leaving a total of adjusted profits after taxes amounting to \$19 billion. For the first three quarters of 1949, on the other hand, the corporate tax liability had fallen to an annual rate of \$10.8 billion. On this basis, adjusted profits after taxes were running at a rate of \$20 billion annually during the first nine months of 1949, \$1 billion above the figure for 1948. As a result, corporations have been able during 1949 to pay out the highest dividends in history (annual rate of \$8.4 billion during the first three quarters as against \$7.9 billion in 1948) without reducing the amount of money they have been plowing back into business. Lest we be accused of performing statistical tricks, we quote a substantially similar conclusion from the Department of Commerce's November *Survey of Current Business* which no one can accuse of animus against the capitalist system:

From the latter data [greatly reduced corporate book-profits], it would appear that corporations cut deeply into retained earnings to maintain dividend distribution, but realistically this was not the case. The stability of net business saving—i.e., of undistributed profits after the inventory valuation adjustment—shows that retained corporate earnings so measured were not reduced by continuation of high dividends in 1949. (p. 4.)

All of this goes a long way toward explaining a phenomenon which has puzzled a great many people. The stock market, having anticipated the recession about the middle of 1948 and then moved with it during the early months of 1949, suddenly and apparently quite unaccountably turned up and has been enjoying a boomlet ever since—the combined index having touched a low of 112 in June and having climbed to 130 by the beginning of November. But now we see that this behavior hasn't been so strange after all. Wall Street just found out that this particular recession belonged to some one else—so far, at any rate—and that it might as well go about its business as usual.

It is not very difficult to find out whose recession this is, either. Workers have suffered heavily, partly in terms of decreased earnings (total compensation of employees dropped from \$144.9 billion in the last quarter of 1948 to \$141.2 billion in the third quarter of 1949), but much more in terms of unemployment and increased insecurity. For every worker who is laid off or put on short time, ten feel their security and livelihood threatened. And with a quarter of all workers not covered by unemployment compensation and those that are covered receiving on the average about one-quarter of their wage losses, the much-praised and much-abused (but largely non-existent) "welfare state" does little to bring material support or peace of mind.

The hardest-hit so far, however, have been the farmers. With

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postwar shortages declining or disappearing in many lines and surpluses building up in others, agricultural prices fell more or less steadily from a 1948 high of 300 (1909-1914=100) to 243 in October 1949. This price drop was, of course, accompanied by a decline in farm income. The monthly average farm income of \$2,609 million in 1948 fell to \$2,132 million during the first nine months of 1949. If your income is slashed by 18 percent in the course of a year, you have every reason to feel that you are taking it on the chin. These few figures, incidentally, explain why the Brannan Plan for maintaining farm incomes while allowing prices to consumers to fall is already a red-hot political issue and is certain to play a crucial role in the 1950 congressional elections.

What is the economic outlook as we enter a new year and a new decade?

No one can answer this question with 100 percent assurance, but one thing does seem certain. What actually happens this year and in the years immediately ahead will depend heavily on the course of the cold war. In a very important sense, American capitalism is now dominated by militarism. If the cold war were called off and the military budget were reduced to the level of the mid-thirties (allowing for price rises, the figure would be in the neighborhood of \$2 billion a year), there is no doubt whatever that we would have a crack-up comparable to that of 1929-33. On the other hand, if the cold war should lead in the near future to a hot war, production and employment would once again soar as they did during the period 1941-45.

We do not believe that either of these developments is likely; but even if we can exclude the extremes, there is still a wide range of alternatives to choose from. Will the cold war be gradually stepped up—from 20 to 25 to 30 billion dollars, and so on indefinitely? Or will it remain at about the present level of around \$20 billion (counting in the cost of the Marshall Plan and other subsidies to foreign governments)? Or finally, will it be trimmed back, as the isolationists and the economizers advocate?

This is not the place to try to answer these questions. The best we can do is to proceed with our economic analysis on the basis of a definite assumption, and for this purpose the most illuminating course is probably to postulate a continuance of the cold war on approximately the present level of combined expenditures on armaments and foreign subsidies.

We are in effect assuming, then, that the amount of government support for the economy remains high but shows no marked upward or downward trend. The crucial question now is this: what will happen to gross private investment?

This question can be somewhat simplified without great danger.

Gross private investment, as reported in official statistics, consists of three parts: new construction, producers' durable equipment, and change in business inventories. Now in the years since the war, changes in business inventories have played an important role. They were a very large positive magnitude through 1948, a fact which can be explained by the drastic depletion of inventories that characterized the war years. By the end of 1948, the pipelines had largely been filled again; and, as we have seen above, it was a reversal in the trend of inventory accumulation which produced the recession of last year. From now on, it seems unlikely that there will be any large-scale or sustained movement of inventories either way. If this is correct, we should focus our analysis on private investment excluding this item, or what may be called private fixed investment.

The postwar boom has been fed by private fixed investment activity on an unprecedented scale. This is true not only in terms of absolute quantities but also in terms of percentages of gross national product. In the third quarter of 1949, private fixed investment was running at an annual rate of \$37.4 billion, equal to 14.6 percent of the gross national product. (The corresponding figures for 1948 were very nearly the same.) By way of comparison, even in 1929, the peak year of the boom of the twenties, private fixed investment was 13.7 percent of (a much smaller) gross national product.

Never in the history of capitalism has an investment boom been sustained for more than a few years together. In fact, nearly all schools of economics agree that a slump in private fixed investment is the major factor in turning prosperity into depression: it is much more volatile and fluctuates within much wider limits than total production. For example, from 1929 to 1932, private fixed investment declined from 13.7 percent of gross national product to 6 percent of (a greatly diminished) gross national product.

There is not the slightest reason to assume that things will be different this time. If anything is reasonably certain, it is that this investment boom will come to an end, as earlier ones have, and that when it does there will be a powerful tendency for the whole economy to go into a slump.

Nevertheless, it would probably be a mistake to expect in the near future a breakdown on the model of the early thirties. For one thing, private fixed investment is likely to hold up for some time yet in certain important fields—housing, public utilities, and certain types of producers' durable equipment. Hence for a while at least the decline is likely to be more gradual than it was after 1929 when all the major lines of investment seemed to reach a point of saturation more or less simultaneously.

For another thing, the American economy today, unlike in 1929,

contains certain features which would automatically tend to cushion the effects of even a sudden collapse of private fixed investment. Unemployment compensation, inadequate as it is, checks the fall in workers' purchasing power. Trade unions are much more powerful than ever before and would certainly resist any attempt at wholesale wage-cutting. Agricultural price supports put a floor under the decline in farm incomes. But most important of all, with cold war outlays at their present high level, any sizable drop in national income would quickly and automatically launch the government on a career of heavy counter-deflationary deficit spending. The reason for this lies in the nature of the tax structure which in times of falling income yields proportionately reduced revenue and thus automatically produces a growing deficit if expenditures are maintained.

We conclude, therefore, that the boom is approaching its end but that no sudden collapse is to be anticipated. The cycle is definitely moving into a downward phase, but the descent may be gradual.

But we have not yet taken account of all the factors which will have a part in shaping American economic development in the next few years. In addition to what may be called cyclical factors, other influences are at work which orthodox economists too often ignore. Chief among these, we believe, is the capitalists' drive to rationalize industry, to introduce improved and for the most part labor-saving machinery, to cut costs and speed up production. Now that war-induced shortages of plant and equipment have been largely made good, it can be expected that this rationalization drive will really get into high gear.

It is sometimes assumed that increased rationalization must be accompanied by increased investment and hence that it must have a stimulating effect on the economy. This is completely wrong. A rapid rate of rationalization can be financed out of depreciation and obsolescence accruals, and one of its features may be to save capital as well as labor. *Under capitalism*, rationalization can simultaneously increase productivity and unemployment, raise profits and lower production. And we expect that in the period which we are now entering it will have precisely these effects with an intensified force never before approached even in the history of American capitalism.

Putting everything together, and assuming no drastic changes in the level of the cold war, the economic prospect is that American capitalism will go from good to bad, and from bad to worse—not suddenly or dramatically but gradually and surely. Economists and historians of the future may well speak of the great depression of the fifties without ever being quite able to decide when it began.

(December 16, 1949)

1949

BY KONNI ZILLIACUS

We reproduce here, by permission, the concluding section of a chapter entitled "The U. S. Prepares for War" from Konni Zilliacus' new book, *I Choose Peace*, just published as a Penguin Special in Britain. Zilliacus was elected a Labor Party member of the House of Commons in 1945 and was expelled from the party for opposing Bevin's foreign policy last summer. Born in Japan, his mother American and his father Swedo-Finnish, Zilliacus was educated on the continent, in Britain, and in the United States. He served in the RAF during World War I and during the inter-war period was a permanent official of the League of Nations. Since the end of World War II, he has travelled widely in Europe, east and west, where his command of eight languages and his long experience in international affairs have given him unrivalled advantages for studying and understanding the present situation. Zilliacus is a fighting socialist and one of the world's leading authorities on international affairs. We do not entirely agree with all the conclusions and recommendations of the last three chapters of *I Choose Peace*, but we believe that the historical and analytical portions of the book, constituting approximately seven-eighths of the whole, entitle it to be ranked as one of the most important pieces of socialist literature to appear in 1949. It is a storehouse of factual information, an arsenal of telling quotations (many out of the mouths of the bitterest enemies of socialism and peace), and a keen analysis of Anglo-American world policy.—The Editors.

During 1949, statesmen and public opinion in the great western democracies became dimly aware of the growing failure of their whole post-war world policy. In essence, and under many layers of confusion, contradiction, camouflage, humbug, and hypocrisy, it is the same old policy of "preservation of society on existing lines and resistance to Communistic propaganda" that was practised after the first world war and so painfully and unnecessarily lost the peace.

But last time the policy was temporarily successful in arresting the forces of social change and social revolution in Europe, at the cost of acting as midwife to the capitalist counter-revolutions of Mussolini, Hitler, and their minor disciples in eastern and southern Europe. By the time the policy of restoring the old order collapsed in the great slump and its aftermath, the backing of western torism for central, south, and east European counter-revolution had raised the Frankenstein monster of the Fascist Axis, which was wound up by appeasement and from which humanity had to be delivered at a bitter price.

This time the events of years have been telescoped into months, and the defenders of the old order have been fighting in the outskirts and on the beaches and edges of the Eurasian continent. Their policy

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of restoring and propping up capitalism has begun to collapse before it really got started. For it is too late to restore the old order and too early to drag the peoples into another great war as the last throw of the despairing gamblers of die-hard torism.

In China, it proved too late to prop up the rotting old order, represented by Chiang Kai-Shek, and too early to drag the American and British people into war for any such insane purpose. The colonial wars in Indo-China, Indonesia, and Malaya, against that background, are doomed to failure, after a more or less prolonged and bloody deadlock.

In the Middle East, it proved too late to keep Arab feudalism from collapsing, when its rotten social foundations were shaken by defeat, in spite of the imposing facade of the synthetic Arab League made in Britain. It was too early to bluff or trick the British people into war, and Mr. Bevin in attempting to embroil them met his Chanak.*

In Greece, all President Truman's money and all his men have failed to put the Humpty Dumpty of Greek royalist fascism securely on the throne again. It is too late to make the Greek people return to the hideous past of the Metaxas fascist dictatorship and the oath-breaking King George, however hard, long, expensively, bloodily, destructively, self-righteously, and hypocritically American and British interventionists may try to make them submit. Nor is the British or American people in a mood to be stampeded into a world war for this vile cause.

The battle of the western interventionists has been lost long ago in the rest of the Balkans and eastern Europe. The foundations of socialism are already impregnably strong in these countries. It is too late to restore capitalism and too early for the war-weary peoples to be led into a crusade, even by clergymen praying for blood and atom bombs in the name of the religion of brotherly love.

As the reactions of the American and British peoples and the United Nations Assembly have shown, it is too early to seek support for starting a war in the attempt to inflict "overwhelming diplomatic defeat on the Russians" by compelling them to accept the Anglo-American claim to remain in Berlin in the Soviet Zone, while excluding the Russians from any share in the settlement of western Germany. On the other hand, it is too late to restore capitalism in Germany. Socialism is already taking its place in the Soviet Zone on a scale that cannot be undone.

* When Mr. Lloyd George, after the first world war, indulged in saber-rattling at Chanak in Asia Minor against the Turks, who had just defeated his proteges the Greeks, he was repudiated by public opinion and the Tories in the coalition.

In western Germany, the Anglo-American restoration of capitalism and splitting of the country have succeeded merely in reviving the unholy trinity of German Big Business, militarism, and fascism, and encouraging it to embark on a policy of blackmailing the Allies and working for war. This is setting up social tension and resentment within West Germany and providing the German workers with the arguments not only of glaring social injustice but of national unity, national independence, and peace. It is causing alarm and dissension in the West and rubbing salt in the wounds of France as the facts become known.

In western Europe and Italy, public opinion is beginning to realize the uncomfortable fact that the Marshall Plan on present lines cannot succeed, and that in 1952 western Europe may be worse off than it is today and still hopelessly insolvent. This prospect is made even gloomier by the burdens of rearmament and conscription imposed by the American strategic plan, the cutting off of western from eastern Europe, and the social cleavage and conflict imposed by American intervention.

The longer-headed among the western statesmen must be reflecting that they could have ended American intervention in China a year earlier, on terms that would have led to the formation of a broadly-based Left Wing Kuomintang-Democratic League-Communist coalition government, safeguarding legitimate western interests in China, if they had been prepared to compromise and cooperate with the Soviet Union in the Far East. Now they have to take their chance at the hands of the victorious Communists, after the defeat and downfall of the near-fascist regime they backed so stubbornly and bloodily. Similarly, the kind of policy to which Labor was pledged in the Middle East could have been applied on much more favorable terms at any time between 1945 and 1948. Now it is necessary to face the situation resulting from the defeat and total collapse of Mr. Bevin's Tory-inspired feudal Arab bloc and the alienation of the State of Israel.

A year hence, these statesmen may well argue, it may be necessary to face an equally unfavorable situation in Greece. In any case, with the collapse of the Crimean War policy buttressed on the Arab bloc in the Middle East, there is no political sense in continuing intervention in Greece. And if Britain and the United States find it necessary to come to terms with the Soviet Union and Communism in China, and with the Soviet Union and social insurrection against Arab feudalism in the Middle East, they have no moral justification, if ever they had any, for the further vivisection of the Greek people. . . .

The bargaining position of western Europe, which needs food and raw materials, is at best not very strong against eastern Europe and

the Soviet Union, which can feed and house their populations and build up their own industries, although to do so will be a longer and harder job without full trade with the West. But with American economic aid based on war preparations, restoring capitalism, alienating the workers, and cutting off trade with eastern Europe, on the one hand, and socialist reconstruction in the East forging ahead with increasing momentum on the other, the bargaining position of the West promises to be even worse in two or three years' time than it is at present, even if United States capitalism does not suffer a "major recession" in the meantime. Bit by bit, not through the operation of reason or on grounds of mercy and justice, but simply under the pressure of sheer physical necessity, military defeat, social collapse, and economic adversity, the policy of Anglo-American anti-Communist intervention and anti-Soviet power politics is being abandoned in the Far and Middle East and weakening in Europe. But there is little sign that the powers that be are drawing sane political conclusions from the tale of deadlock and breakdown.

Anglo-American world policy in fact is not so much a policy as a series of retreats and rearguard actions by die-hard defenders of capitalism, who can be forced to acknowledge defeat but will go on preparing for war, making trouble and refusing to make peace with blind obstinacy and vindictiveness, until their own peoples rise up, sick of the imbecility, hypocrisy, and cruelty of their rulers and longing for peace, and call the fear- and hate-crazed warmongers to account.

ART AND SOCIALISM

BY ROBERT D. FEILD

Considering the actual way we live, we cannot help wondering if our vaunted achievements are in any way consistent with those ideals and aspirations which have from time immemorial inspired man in his search for ultimate fulfillment. Admittedly we want more and more of the good things of life—but do we really want more and more of what we are getting? As we look back upon the great cultural epochs of the past, those periods in which we all too eagerly admit

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that art flourished, do we not secretly regret our apparent abandonment of many of their objectives, and in the bottom of our hearts envy some of the very needs they so superbly filled? In spite of the wonders of our age and the incredible resources science has put at our disposal have we not, perhaps, lost something during the search for increasing abundance which counteracts to a great extent the success of our accomplishment?

In man's pursuit of happiness it may be assumed that he will not be satisfied merely to have his needs for survival taken care of. He wants his desires gratified to the limits of his ability to enjoy the very best he is capable of producing. Having been endowed with the capacity for discrimination, he has the urge within himself to have his developing needs met with an ever-increasing satisfaction. We have forgotten that man is by nature an artist. He not only wants more and more, he wants things better and better; and he always has the capacity to reach the heights he sets for himself. There is only one prerequisite for an ever-increasing elevation in the quality of things he produces and that is his freedom to determine for himself what he wants to produce.

One of our troubles today is confusion over the word "art." It has become associated with certain rarified products which have little or nothing to do with what we consider basic for our well-being and by which we judge our standard of living. And the reasons for this confusion are not far to seek. It has been discovered that people not only can be trained to want certain things but that they can be persuaded to buy things that they do not actually want. Given control over the means of production and the channels for communicating ideas, one who is enterprising enough is free to corrupt public taste to an unlimited degree. Under such conditions, the improvement of the product may simply mean further deceiving the public into thinking it wants what is offered, and not at all meeting its real needs more effectively. If the general end of art is, as Aristotle insisted, the good of man, then there is no place for art in our commercial way of life.

But although it is our proud boast that we are living in a salesman's era, that the whole success of our economic system is in fact dependent on successful salesmanship, art is still a word to conjure with whenever cultural values come up for discussion. One of the extraordinary anomalies in contemporary life is our continued reverence for so-called works of art, and the fabulous prices they fetch in the open market. Fifty-seventh Street in New York has become the focal point for the sale of those commodities which will not only guarantee the purchaser cultural respectability, but which will set him apart as one who, by the very fact of ownership, is indirectly contributing to the social good. And amongst works of art, paintings by the

Old Masters are still far and away the most coveted and the most expensive. The word "painting" has become in the minds of most people synonymous with "art." *judging not*

If we are to re-assert our rights of self-determination and assume the responsibility of building a culture of our own in the historic sense, we must first of all recover what may be called the art-initiative. We must explode the theory that art is something outside or beyond our daily needs; something abnormal to be enjoyed by the extremely wealthy and then only in terms of what they can buy from a self-styled art dealer, frequently regardless of their own understanding.

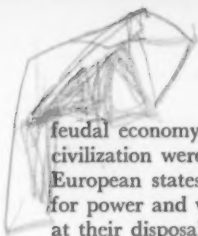
Since painting has become the type of art par excellence in our present state of cultural confusion, it may be well to examine for a moment the true nature of picture-making. Painting is just a normal human activity, one of the oldest and most essential in the history of man. Would anyone be foolhardy enough to argue that a bad painting is a work of art? That a mess of pigments carelessly smeared over a given surface deserves any commendation? Surely not. If on the other hand, a picture is well painted, that is an entirely different matter. It may then indeed be considered a work of art. But why? Not simply because it is a painting, but rather because it is painted well. The degree in which it is well done, in fact, is the degree in which it may be considered a work of art. But surely that applies to the making of anything. Why, in particular, should it be reserved for painting? The heresy implied in such a question is of too shocking a character for one not to be aware of the risks being run in daring to formulate it. Shades of Giotto, Angelico, Michaelangelo, and the hosts of great masters of the craft are inevitably conjured up as still living witnesses of how miracles have been performed in paint. But still, in all humility, the question must be asked. For if the actual business of picture-making as such is no more meritorious than making a shoe or baking a cake, then perhaps we may begin to concern ourselves with the art quality in painting, and try to determine what constitutes a good picture, and how its merits are to be judged. If we are honest with ourselves, we shall be forced to admit that the popular conception of painting as more or less synonymous with art is nothing but a myth. A man just because he paints pictures is no more an artist than a shoeblack polishing shoes or a miner working on the coal face. What really concerns us is a question of standards. What is true of painting holds true in all other fields of creative activity. But who is to judge and how are the standards to be recognized?

The degree in which a thing is well done can only be determined by the way in which it fulfills its purpose. If we do not know the underlying purpose, how can we possibly decide how successfully the need has been met? This implies that there are always two forces at

work in the production of anything: the stimulus latent in the need, and the creative energy required to produce what is wanted. Both are equally responsible for the quality of the result. This relationship between the need and its fulfillment, or in other words, between the patron and the artist, has always been taken for granted in those periods of history which we recognize as the great cultural epochs. Unfortunately, during the last few centuries in western civilization the equilibrium has been thrown so increasingly off balance that today we no longer assume that the patron has any responsibility for establishing standards, but on the contrary should merely determine what ought to be done. How this disruption in society has been brought about is traceable to a number of factors, but primarily to the gradual abandonment of any concern for quality in the production of needful articles and the rise of the profit motive as the controlling force in the economic system.

Most people, when referring to the Industrial Revolution, somehow hold the machine responsible for the lowering of standards. The machine's ability to produce more or less identical articles in large quantities, without the direct interference of the hand as a shaping tool or the mind as a supervising factor, has made it suspect. All of which presupposes that the spirit of man is interfered with by the energy latent in the universe and that his imagination is confounded when he tries to put into operation techniques which he himself has invented. It can hardly be argued that a beautiful or useful thing ceases to be beautiful or useful just because it can be duplicated indefinitely. Surely the fault cannot lie in the machine, but rather in the way it is operated and the uses to which it is put. Ah, you may say, that is all very fine, but what about the imagination? What about the artist's intuitive ability to conceive in the mind's eye a form he has the urge to create, and his God-given power to express the vision on canvas or wall surface? Does not the Sistine Ceiling, for instance, transcend any work that could possibly be produced by a machine? Admittedly, Michaelangelo did not have recourse to power-driven machinery; the spray gun was not invented in his day; but on the other hand, the T.V.A. could hardly have been built by hand. Was there any less imagination required in the conception of the T.V.A.? Had it less to do with God's purpose? Was not the spirit of man equally at work in his gladness to be alive and in the fulfillment of his needs? Is it not, then, entirely a matter of how to employ the best techniques in accomplishing what is most worth doing?

The gradual abandonment of standards in the last few centuries is entirely a social and moral issue, and has nothing whatever to do with the inventions of science. The tragedy lies in the fact that machine techniques were developed for anti-social purposes when the old



x = 0.00
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feudal economy was falling apart and the cultural values in western civilization were increasingly at a discount. It goes back to when the European states began to compete with each other and the Church for power and were forced to expand overseas markets by any means at their disposal. It was the ruthless determination of predatory merchants and overlords to exploit the working man in their own countries and the innocent masses abroad to their personal advantage which is responsible for the entirely imaginary conflict which has arisen between art and science. That any such conflict could exist in reality would belie the normal assumption that all available resources should be utilized for making as well as possible whatever was socially needful, be it a painting or a picture post-card, a cathedral or a causeway. Art ceased to play a meaningful role in society when scientific research became directed towards the production of things as cheaply as possible, that is to say, allowing the greatest profit to the producer, regardless either of need or of quality. Only then did we have to invent an excuse for art and to separate out certain types of human activity from all others, which we labeled the Fine Arts, presumably because they had no other useful purpose than to glorify the courts of decadent kings or adorn the palaces of a new plutocracy.

What may be called the deculturalization of Europe developed in direct ratio to the spread and momentum of capitalism. As the bourgeoisie increased their power, they became less and less concerned with any moral responsibility; while the people became more and more enslaved to a system which automatically degraded their standard of living. As this new pattern of society began to emerge, it is hardly surprising that the word art should lose all meaning. There was no longer any need for making things as well as possible since there was no discriminating patronage. It was to offset their complete lack of sensibility that those in power began to compete with each other for the purchase of Old Masters, the most conspicuous of all forms of consumption, in imagined emulation of the great art patrons of the past. Since they were quite unable to recognize quality when they saw it and could only judge the value of what they purchased in terms of the amount they had to pay, they were fair game for whoever wanted to take advantage of their ignorance. And the art dealer rose to the occasion.

Today the Fine Arts are booming, while the atom bomb is being relied upon to hold together for at least a little while longer our present social order. The time is rapidly approaching, however, when something will have to be done about both. Economically, they are equally unsound investments. It is very unprofitable to go on producing bombs without using them; and, anyway, it is becoming increasingly evident that they are valueless even for the purpose intended. One

cannot avoid the conclusion that capitalism is becoming broody, despairingly sitting on a lot of addled egg-bombs, in the vain hope that some day they will hatch out into some brand new techniques for the preservation of the *status quo*. Meantime, the insistence that our "culture" must be maintained at all costs is only possible so long as money is available to pay the price exacted by 57th Street. The Old Masters will start coming off the walls when real estate values begin to tumble and their owners must choose between, shall we say, a medieval altar-piece and a house to live in.

Socialism is not a revolutionary theory aimed at destroying with ruthless animosity all private property and driving the wealthy into destitution. Its proponents are only insisting that it is the normal and inevitable way to restore social equilibrium, so that all may profit according to their deserts.

Art in its traditional meaning is only possible today in a socialist form of society. A government of the people, by the people, for the people must always assume that those endowed with authority will have mastered their craft. As artists, they will be responsible for governing well, that is to say, for meeting the needs of their patrons, those who elected them to office. And only the people can be in a position to judge the effectiveness of their work. Once such an equilibrium is established in government, it must inevitably penetrate the whole social structure, restoring the balance between need and fulfillment, patron and artist, in all forms of human endeavor. Only when this has been brought about will we be able to get down to work, honest-to-goodness work, and start planning the kind of world we want to live in. Time will be at our disposal not only to plan things on a vast scale but to execute unique objects for the adornment of society and the gratification of the individual patron. Such time-honored crafts as painting and sculpture, two of the most profound and complex modes of human expression, will recover their rightful place in society. No longer will workers in pigment or in stone be kept on the social periphery, subject to the indignity of having to participate in the Fine Arts racket, or to derive the painful satisfaction of seeing their work exhibited in museums, the repository of things that have outlived their usefulness. There will be no invidious comparison between the machine-made product, be it a motion picture or a mass-produced ornament, and that which is "done by hand."

With the means of production in the hands of the producers, and the purpose of production man's use and enlightenment, art will once again come to be recognized as the prerogative of the people.

EUGENE V. DEBS: UNCOMPROMISING REVOLUTIONARY

BY LEO HUBERMAN

The Civil War freed the capitalists. The victory of the North which broke the chains of slavery for four million black people also brought release to northern capitalists from slaveholder domination of the government. Henceforward the government was to be more to their liking—sympathetic to their needs and willing to be of service. The stage was set for the rapid transformation of the economy of the United States. Before 1865 we had been a great agricultural country; by 1900 we had become the greatest industrial nation in the world. In the next three decades the forward march of American capitalism reached undreamed of heights—until the crash in 1929.

The life span of Eugene Victor Debs parallels almost exactly this period of American capitalism's greatest expansion. He was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, on November 5, 1855, ten years before the end of the Civil War; he died on October 20, 1926, three years before the boom collapsed and the crisis began.

"In his entire life," his biographer tells us, "he never made an important decision on the basis of theoretical study." Not books then, but experience—personal experience with a capitalist system as ruthless as it was dynamic moved this native American worker from respectable conservatism to militant industrial unionism and finally, to socialism.

His experience began early. Terre Haute was a railroad town, and at the age of 14 Debs left high school to become a "railroader"—cleaning grease from the trucks of freight engines. The hours were long, the railroad shops were miserably cold and damp, and wages were low—his pay was 50¢ a day.

In 1871, at the age of 16, he became a locomotive fireman. Two years later he lost his job in the depression of 1873. At the beginning of the depression he had learned what it was like for a worker to have his already low wages slashed to the starvation level; now he was to learn what it was like to be unemployed.

He rode the freights to Evansville in search of work, but found none; he hopped a freight to St. Louis and there was hired as a

This article was inspired by and is largely based on Ray Ginger's biography of Debs, The Bending Cross, Rutgers University Press, \$5.00 (available for \$1.65 in an edition omitting sources and bibliography, from Book Find Club, 401 Broadway, New York 13, N. Y.).

locomotive fireman. In the big city he came face to face with the plight of the working class in a period of unemployment: not enough food, inadequate clothing, families dispossessed from their homes and forced to move into miserable shanties not fit for animals, other families broken up as the father journeyed elsewhere to look for work.

The practice, under capitalism, of putting profits before lives was never better illustrated than by the railroads in the period of combination and expansion. In their ceaseless efforts to cut costs they used worn, unsafe, defective equipment and the resultant accidents, wrecks, and collisions snuffed out the lives of thousands of railroad workers and maimed for life thousands of others. The workers pleaded for the use of automatic brakes and couplers on freight cars but the railroads wouldn't listen. Automatic brakes and couplers cost money; hand braking and coupling cost only lives, so the changeover wasn't made until the railroads were forced to make it. (Under pressure from the railroad brotherhoods the first Federal Safety Appliance Act was passed by Congress in 1893. Later laws calling for federal regulation and inspection of railroad equipment lowered the death rate from accidents to a remarkable degree. In 1890 accidents while coupling and uncoupling cars caused 369 deaths, 7842 injured; in 1943, 19 deaths, 404 injured.)

The unsafe conditions on the railroads worried Debs' mother, and because of her insistent pleading, he quit railroading in 1874 and became a clerk in a wholesale grocery in Terre Haute.

But the lure of the iron highway persisted, and evenings and weekends Debs hung about with railroad men. Then, one evening, he went with his friends to a meeting to hear Joshua Leach, the Grand Master of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. When the meeting was over Debs joined Vigo Lodge No. 16 of the BLF, and later was elected its first secretary. This was his introduction to unionism.

The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, like the other railroad crafts, was from its inception less a trade union and more a cheap insurance society set up to provide benefits to its members in sickness, injury, or death. Twenty years with the BLF in various capacities, as editor of its official journal (the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*), secretary-treasurer, organizer, negotiator, taught Debs a great deal about the labor movement.

He had much to learn. How much, can be gleaned from several of his speeches and writings in his early years as a union official. "A strike at the present time signifies anarchy and revolution," he told the BLF convention following the great railroad upheaval of 1877 when workers struck against a wage cut and were attacked by Pinkerton detectives, state militia, and Federal troops.

And two years later: "Some have gone so far as to say that there

is a natural, a necessary conflict between labor and capital. These are very shallow thinkers, or else very great demagogues."

But the class collaboration policy of the BLF and the other railroad crafts was a failure. No amount of snuggling closer to the bosom of the railroad corporations brought better conditions or higher wages. On the contrary. The less militant the workers were, the worse their conditions grew. So, much as their leaders (Debs among them) abhorred strikes, the workers learned there was no other way. And they learned too, in the strikes, to what lengths of brutality and persecution a rising capitalist class would go with yellow dog contracts, blacklists, spies, hired thugs, clubs, guns, bullets.

The peace-loving, kindly, warm-hearted Debs took a long time to learn these things but he learned them well. Another lesson that was driven home so he never forgot it—and in later years never let anyone else forget it—was the necessity for solidarity and cooperation, for industrial unionism. Long before Frick proved at Homestead in 1892 that "a modern corporation could destroy with one stroke the strongest craft union in America," Debs had become the leader of the movement for a federation of railroad crafts to put an end to the oft-repeated and disastrous practice of one craft scabbing on another.

The depression of 1893 with its usual accompaniment of layoffs, wage cuts, unemployment meant for Debs that railroad labor had to go even further than the federation idea. On June 20, 1893 he announced the formation of the American Railway Union, an industrial union of railroad workers, skilled or unskilled, on the trains or in the shops; a militant low-dues union to take the place of the high-dues benefit-society craft unions.

Debs was the natural choice for president. He had shown extraordinary ability as a leader in the BLF. When he became secretary-treasurer in 1880, the organization was bankrupt and about to fold. He put it on a sound financial basis. Through his tireless organizing efforts on the road the membership had grown from 2000 to 20,000. The *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine* under his editorship was recognized as the best of labor journals, and many of its 33,000 copies each month (it had begun with 3500 subscribers) went to readers outside the railroad industry.

Debs was already the best known of all labor leaders and unquestionably the most beloved. Ginger tells why:

Debs' popularity rested, not so much on spectacular achievements, as on constant service. This service was personal and intimate. Many men did the big things occasionally—he did the little things every day. When he was traveling with a companion, he carried the heaviest grips, slept in the upper berth, sat in the

aisle seat. Men noticed that he never hurried a waitress or a bell-boy, never complained about a hotel room. If there was not enough food to go around, Debs got the small portion. He was always willing to give a loan to a down-and-out railroader, and did not care whether it was repaid. Once he heard that the lack of a good watch was blocking the promotion of another fireman. That was easy enough to take care of, said Debs, and handed the man his own. He had proved a thousand times his willingness not merely to share sacrifice, but to exceed it. So an attitude had developed toward Eugene Debs, an attitude of complete faith and devotion.

Debs' idea of one big industrial union for railroaders caught on like wildfire. Its success was amazing. At every meeting where Debs and his aides spoke, in every town, men rushed up to join the ARU. Not only the unskilled workers who hadn't before been organized, but the skilled firemen, conductors, engineers, joined the ARU. Entire lodges broke away from the old craft unions and joined the ARU. Nothing like it had ever before been seen in America. And nothing like it happened again until 42 years later when another industrial union—the CIO—was launched. "In one year Debs' union signed up a hundred fifty thousand railroaders, while the combined Brotherhoods could list only ninety thousand names and the American Federation of Labor was hard driven to maintain its hundred seventy-five thousand members."

In the years from 1874 when he first joined a union to 1893 when he founded the ARU, Debs had experienced a great deal. Where once he had identified strikes with "anarchy and revolution" now he was quick to point out that "the strike is the weapon of the oppressed," that shorter hours, better conditions, and higher wages were not handed to labor by benevolent employers but were won from them by struggle, solidarity, and strikes. Where once he was the exponent of conservative labor policies, now he was the leading spokesman for militant industrial unionism.

But he was not yet a socialist. In 1893, Ginger writes, "the idea of a social system other than capitalism had never seriously entered Debs' mind." The tie-up between corporate power and government—when it was in the hands of the Republican party—was plain to him. He had been a Democrat all his life, had campaigned for Grover Cleveland three times, and had been elected City Clerk in Terre Haute on the Democratic ticket in 1879, and to the Indiana House of Representatives in 1884. He had yet to learn that capitalist candidates, on *either* ticket, represent the capitalists. He needed still another experience with capitalists, their judges, their laws, their press, their government to pull the blinders from his eyes and make him a socialist.

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The Pullman strike of June 1894 gave him that experience. The ARU, with the same wonderful unity with which it had won a tremendous victory over Jim Hill's Great Northern two months before, was in a position to defeat the Pullman Company and the railroads' General Managers Association, one of the strongest employer groups in the country. But if the employers were not able to break the strike themselves, they could enlist the aid of the courts and the Federal troops. A capitalist government came to the rescue of capitalists engaged in battle with the working class—and a socialist was made. Debs tells the story in "How I Became A Socialist" (1902):

The skirmish lines of the A.R.U. were well advanced. A series of small battles was fought and won without the loss of a man. A number of concessions was made by the corporations rather than risk an encounter. Then came the fight on the Great Northern, short, sharp, and decisive. The victory was complete—the only railroad strike of magnitude ever won by an organization in America.

Next followed the final shock—the Pullman strike—and the American Railway Union again won, clear and complete. The combined corporations were paralyzed and helpless. At this juncture there was delivered, from wholly unexpected quarters, a swift succession of blows that blinded me for an instant and then opened wide my eyes—and in the gleam of every bayonet and the flash of every rifle *the class struggle was revealed*. This was my first practical lesson in Socialism. . . .

Debs was not the only one whose eyes were "opened wide" by the Pullman strike and the growth of monopoly power in the 1890's. The country was seething with discontent. Farm prices were lower than they had been since the Civil War, and workers, hard hit by the depression of 1893, were still suffering low wages and long hours. In 1896, Debs was asked to become the People's Party candidate for president, but the offer came at a time when he was still working out his philosophy, debating the wisdom of working with capitalist reform parties as compared to standing four-square for a revolutionary change in the system. On January 1, 1897 the question of reform versus revolution was finally resolved in his mind:

The issue is Socialism versus Capitalism. I am for Socialism because I am for humanity. We have been cursed with the reign of gold long enough. Money constitutes no proper basis of civilization. The time has come to regenerate society—we are on the eve of a universal change.

From that moment until the end of his days, Debs devoted his life to the cause of socialism. He was the presidential candidate of the

Social Democratic Party in 1900, and of its successor, the Socialist Party, in 1904, 1908, 1912, and 1920—on the last occasion, as convict #9653, serving a ten-year jail sentence in Atlanta for opposition to World War 1. With Debs as its standard-bearer the Socialist Party vote jumped from 96,878 votes in 1900 to 900,000 votes in 1912. This was 6 percent of the total—the equivalent of approximately 3 million votes in the 1948 election.

Debs became one of America's greatest orators. He had a deep affection for and understanding of the common people and he spoke their language. He spoke it in the press as well as on the platform. The jargon so common to too many radicals was completely unfamiliar to him. In not one single article of all that he wrote in the famous *Appeal to Reason* is there a line of that kind of sectarian phraseology which does so much to keep workers from understanding what the class struggle is about. Undoubtedly the absence of jargon was one of the reasons for the spectacular success of the *Appeal*—for years it had a circulation in the hundreds of thousands.

Those in his audiences who came to jeer found themselves listening—and learning. It had taken him years to arrive at his philosophy, but it was based on first-hand experience and was, therefore, a tool which he could handle freely and to advantage in a question period or whenever he was heckled. Ginger tells of one occasion when a man in the front of the hall shouted at Debs that anybody who voted for socialism was throwing away his vote. And Debs retaliated immediately: "You argue that you are throwing your vote away. That's right. Don't vote for freedom—you might not get it. Vote for slavery—you have a cinch on that." One is tempted to ask: was ever a better answer given to that old argument?

His unquestioned sincerity, honesty, and integrity were always felt by the people who heard him. They respected him as a man of courage and principle—one who said what he believed and believed what he said. They loved him as few Americans since Lincoln had been loved.

And they came to hear him. In the 1908 campaign when he campaigned across the country in the famous Red Special—a locomotive and a sleeping car loaded with Socialist literature—they turned out in the thousands in big cities and small. In less than a month 275,000 persons heard him speak. In Chicago he marched at the head of a two-mile parade of 14,000 workers, and 16,000 came to the meeting at the Seventh Regiment Armory. In New York City the Hippodrome was sold out more than a week in advance, and on the night of the meeting tickets were sold "for \$5 each on the sidewalk in front of the hall." The *New York Times* called it "the greatest political meeting ever held in the city."

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But though the rank and file worshipped Debs, he was not so popular with the right-wing leaders of the Socialist Party. On several occasions, they tried unsuccessfully to maneuver the party's presidential nominating convention into selecting another candidate. There were fundamental differences between the railroad worker Debs, who was emotionally and ideologically a left-winger, and the middle-class intellectuals like Morris Hillquit, Job Harriman, and Victor Berger, who were emotionally and ideologically right-wingers.

Debs felt that AFL craft unions had outlived their usefulness, were reactionary and no longer in the interest of the working class; he was one of the founders of the IWW in 1905, and a firm believer in revolutionary industrial unionism; the right wing leaders were reformists who wanted to work within the AFL even to the extent of compromising with socialist principles.

Debs argued that "numbers count for nothing; principle and progress for everything." When, in 1910, the Socialist Party won some election victories, the right wing was jubilant. But not Debs. He charged that in the party there were "not a few members who regard vote-getting as of supreme importance, no matter by what method the votes are secured, and this leads them to hold out inducements and make representations which are not at all compatible with the stern and uncompromising spirit of a revolutionary party." And, he added, it was treason to regard the Socialist Party platform "as a bait for votes rather than as a means of education."

Another reason for Debs' disdain of Socialist electoral victories was the fact that most of the Socialists who were elected, like those who were officials of the party, were not workers but professionals—ministers, lawyers, and editors. "Debs declared this wrong. The Socialist Party, as the party of the American workingman, should be guided and led by workingmen. The better-educated members can serve in other ways, said Debs . . . but control of the organization should not remain in their hands."

Another break between Debs and the right-wing leaders came with America's entry into World War I. On the day after the declaration of war, an emergency convention of the party adopted a report reaffirming its allegiance to the principle of working class solidarity all over the world and denouncing the war as a crime against the people. The report was submitted to a national referendum and was supported overwhelmingly.

Then things got hot for those who stood firm against the war. Halls were wrecked, homes were stoned, men were whipped and tarred and feathered, radical publications were banned from the mails, there was a wave of arrests, raids, indictments. Many right-wing leaders changed their minds, came out for the war. But not Gene Debs. He

stood by his socialist principles. He was against the war and he said so—again and again.

On June 30, 1918 he was arrested for an anti-war speech to the Ohio convention of the Socialist Party. He refused to allow any witnesses to be put on in his defense and in his own address to the jury said: "I cannot take back a word I have said. I cannot repudiate a sentence I have uttered. I stand before you guilty of having made this speech." On September 14 he was sentenced to ten years in prison.

The conflict between the left and right wings of the SP was heightened with the coming of the Russian Revolution. In 1919, the left-wingers, though in the majority, were nevertheless expelled and promptly formed the Communist Party. Debs, in Atlanta at the time, remained with the SP, but his attitude on Russia, as on nearly everything else, was much closer to that of the Communists. As early as June 16, 1918 he declared "that the Bolsheviks of Russia were the inspiration of the world and that he hoped their ideas would come to prevail in America." In the winter of that year Debs, speaking "as a Socialist, as a revolutionist, and as a Bolshevik, if you please," appealed again and again for support to the Soviet government.

While he was serving time in Atlanta, and particularly after his release on Xmas Day, 1921, by a pardon from Harding, both the Socialists and the Communists tried to enlist Debs on their side. But the Socialists were much more persistent, and they had in their favor the fact that while they put much of their time and energy into the amnesty campaign for Debs, the Communists, to their shame, "were so preoccupied with internal problems that they gave little aid to the political prisoners." Though the Socialists had moved even further away from the philosophy of Debs than ever before—they had given up the fight for industrial unionism, were working closely with Gompers and the AFL, and had substituted for the theory of the class struggle a program of right-wing opportunism—he continued to remain a member of the SP. At the same time, in spite of the fact that many Communists were denouncing him as "a traitor to the workers," he sided with them often and continued to write for their press.

Debs had written in February, 1919, "From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet I am Bolshevik and proud of it," and a year later he defended the curtailment of civil liberties in Russia in these words: "During the transition period the revolution must protect itself. . . . I heartily support the Russian Revolution without reservation." But four years later, on July 26, 1922, he indicated that he did have some reservations; in a wire to Lenin concerning 22 Russian Social Revolutionaries on trial for treason, he said: "I protest with all civilized people of our common humanity against the execution of any of the Social Revolutionaries or the unjust denial of their liberty.

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Soviet Russia can set an example by refusing to follow the practices of worldwide czardom and should uphold the higher standards we seek to erect and profess to observe."

But his faith in the Revolution remained firm. Six months after the wire was sent to Lenin, he wrote in praise of the Bolsheviks in *The Liberator* which was fast becoming an unofficial organ of the Communist Workers Party and on which he continued to serve as a contributing editor:

For five years they have stood with more than Spartan courage against the foul assaults of the whole criminal capitalist world.

They have waded through hell in their own blood to banish hell from the earth and bring peace to the world. . . .

The Russian Republic stands triumphant, gloriously triumphant in its fifth anniversary, a beacon light of hope and promise to all mankind!

In the days before Atlanta, Debs wrote article after article and gave lecture after lecture in every part of the country in every tense strike situation or labor case—for Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone in 1906, for the McNamara brothers in 1911. Now, in the last year of his life, a sick, tired old man of 71, he was active in the campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti.

To the very end of his days he was a champion of the oppressed. The American working class, in the period of capitalism's greatest expansion, needed a leader in its struggle for freedom from wage-slavery. Eugene Victor Debs was that leader.

Ginger's book is first rate in every respect. It is a very thorough job—he pored over all the documents and interviewed all the available people who knew Debs and could throw light on his career and his personality. It is sound scholarship, clearly written, with all the drama of simplicity. It is particularly valuable in the emphasis it places on Debs as a revolutionary whose position on every crucial issue was principled and uncompromising. Ginger is right in criticizing the current fashion "to minimize his radical beliefs in favor of his purity of character." Debs did, indeed, love mankind—that's why he tried so hard to free it from the bondage of capitalism. He was noble, warm, generous to a fault, saintlike—but he believed in the class struggle and had an undying hatred for the capitalist system. He was more than a humanitarian—he was a courageous fighter for humanity.

This is the less fashionable but more accurate picture of Debs portrayed by Ginger. *The Bending Cross* should be in the library of every one interested in the radical movement in America, or for that matter of every one interested in using the history of the past as a weapon in shaping the future.

WHY I BELIEVE IN SOCIALISM

BY JOHN S. JENKINS

The other day an American student, recently arrived in Prague, surprised me by asking whether I really believed socialism superior to capitalism. How could he question the obvious? To most Europeans western and eastern alike, the need for socialism (or at least some degree of it) is taken for granted. Political arguments revolve not around "free enterprise" and socialism, but rather how to achieve socialism. It is not so much the end but the means that is a cause for disagreement. In fact one might say that socialism has at last become respectable, people of all political colors advocating it in varying amounts. More than two years in England and almost a year in Prague had so accustomed me to the ideas and workings of socialist policies that an advocate of the capitalist system seemed like a voice from the past. It had been so long since I had come face to face with someone believing in this system, I had almost forgotten that such people still existed. At least they were extinct in Europe, I thought.

After the initial surprise, I began asking myself just how I had arrived at this position, how I had come to believe in socialism.

Looking back upon my childhood, I remembered my conservative father and the business career he had planned for me, the Catholic school where I studied catechism and served as an altar boy, the winters at an expensive prep school in Florida, the summers on the farm in Canada, the fashionable fraternity at college. All seemed to point to anything but a socialist outlook. But, on reflection, I could recall circumstances and events which probably helped to prepare the soil in which my socialist ideas were later able to take root. Perhaps it was my religious upbringing? Or was it what I had witnessed in Florida: segregation, the fact that Negroes were not allowed to remain in the white sections of town after a certain hour in the evening; how, representing well over half the population, they were forbidden to set foot on the many miles of sandy beach fronting the town? Or was it reading about lynchings in the local Florida press? Perhaps it was the depression of the thirties, the sight of apple vendors lining the New York streets, that helpless man huddled over a cup of coffee in an automat scanning the paper in hope of a job? But at the time all these unpleasant things had passed me by.

John S. Jenkins is an American student who has been at English and Czechoslovakian universities since 1946. This article was written in Prague in November.

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It was not until I went to college that I first began to realize that all in the world was not well. I saw that war, misery, and disease ravaged the earth; that the majority of mankind lived on the verge of starvation, while a few systematically burned and destroyed food to insure that prices remained high. I knew that something was wrong, but I did not know quite what. Studying economics, I learned about the business cycle and fell under the influence of Keynes. I saw that many of man's ills could be overcome, that the booms and slumps of capitalism could be smoothed out. Capitalism was essentially healthy, all it required was a few adjustments. With the assistance of economic and financial measures on the part of the government, all again would be well. From the economic point of view it was feasible. Only the question of implementation remained. There was no need for "half-baked" socialist schemes, bringing in their wake regimentation and loss of freedom. The war was on. Full employment existed. Business was booming. The new economic principles must be put into practice right away. Prosperity must be retained. The misery and unemployment of the pre-war years must never be allowed to return. I was not alone in these thoughts; many students shared them.

Shortly after graduation from college, I was drafted into the Navy. But my studies were interrupted only temporarily; and on being released from service, I went to London to study Russian. I must confess that I left for England with considerable apprehension. The Labor Government still seemed to me sinister and foreboding. As a Keynesian, I was in general agreement with moderate government interference and control of business. But Labor's schemes of wholesale nationalization horrified me. The Liberal Party would have been far better, I thought.

I arrived in London on September 28, 1946. At first it was difficult to adapt myself to the habits and ways of British life. I was determined, however, to acquaint myself as best I could with British politics. I made a point of reading a cross section of the press. I was anxious to know just how the new Labor government was working and how the people looked upon it. After a year in England, I saw that the government was not so bad after all; the people seemed happy, and, for most, life was better than before the war. There was full employment; free medical, dental, and optical care would soon be introduced. I travelled about the country during vacations, always looking, always with an open ear, trying to discern the attitude of the people to the government. I found that many of my wealthier friends, although their incomes were as fat if not fatter than ever before, complained bitterly. They compared the government with those in Eastern Europe, calling it communist and all the dreadful things they could imagine. They criticized currency restrictions which limited their

trips abroad, shortage of "petrol," and of course food rationing—although, oddly enough, those complaining the loudest invariably fared the best. On the other hand, the working people, the miner, the man in the factory, the busman, the building worker, were solidly behind the Labor Party. They did not complain about currency and petrol restrictions. They were better off than before the war. They had jobs. And, what was all important, they had their own government in power. Even today, despite a steadily falling standard of living, this has a tremendous psychological effect upon the British worker. So eventually I saw that the Labor government was not quite the beast it had been made out.

Here, I thought, was the beginning of socialism, and it was not so bad after all. Here was a new and gradual road to socialism. There was no need for drastic measures, socialism could be evolved. The doctrine of the class struggle was now obsolete. Gradually, the public sector of the economy would grow, encroaching upon the private sector; and with time, almost imperceptibly, a painless transition to socialism would be effected. This way no one would suffer unduly. Even the capitalists could be educated and compensated into accepting socialism peacefully. The British genius for compromise had once again found the middle way.

But what about Labor's foreign policy? Even I, coming fresh from the land of "free enterprise," felt Britain's policy in this sphere too conservative. In actual fact, the government was pursuing the same old imperialist policy of its Tory predecessors. How could this be explained? The government produced all sorts of excuses to justify its position. But could a socialist policy at home be squared with a conservative policy abroad? I was doubtful but decided to reserve judgment till later.

What about the Soviet form of socialism? Like most of my generation at college, I knew nothing about Marxism. As for Lenin, his name was just a vague sound. In England things were different. One met students and professors who had studied a bit of Marx, though it was rare to find anyone in academic circles who considered his doctrines to be much more than a curiosity. Nevertheless, here was an atmosphere of intellectual freedom and tolerance. One could at least discuss Marxism without being "un-English." Gradually, my political horizon widened. I came into contact with students from the British Empire, the Far East, eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. Here was an opportunity to exchange views and experiences, a chance to learn about life in countries behind the "iron curtain." They talked one way and the newspapers another. Which was I to believe? I was confused. So ended my first year abroad.

By the beginning of my second year in England, life was already

becoming more difficult. Prices began to rise. Wartime savings were rapidly being exhausted. The worsening internal situation was due largely to the growing disequilibrium in Britain's balance of payments. She was buying more from dollar countries than she could sell in return. To close the widening dollar gap, the government appealed to the country to produce more. But one of the chief factors working against an improvement in Britain's dollar position was the vast military expenditures necessitated by a Tory foreign policy. As the cold war intensified, Britain's position became critical. Under pressure, she was forced to increase military expenditures and restrict trade with eastern Europe.

These last two factors, coupled with a general tightening up of international trade in the west, so taxed the already weakened economic position of Great Britain that she was forced not only to abandon further socialist advances but actually to forsake some of the achievements already made. The only cure, it was argued, was to reduce government spending. The cuts, when they came, would be certain to hit the government's socialist measures rather than military expenditure. The medicine prescribed for Britain's economic ills was a reduction in the standard of living of her people. Real wages were to be cut in order to lower production costs.

So at last a point was approaching when the discrepancy between Labor's foreign and domestic policies must soon disappear. The combination of a Tory foreign policy and a Labor home policy had become untenable. One or the other would have to give way. Unfortunately for socialism in Britain, foreign policy was proving the stronger.

The government argued that there was no alternative. Blame was placed on the general world situation. Labor's case rested on the assumption that the governments of the Soviet Union and eastern Europe were preparing an aggressive war against the West; that the peoples of these countries were terrorized, underfed, and awaited momentarily liberation by the Americans; that the economies of these countries were in a precarious state. Under these circumstances, what else could Britain do but side with Anglo-American capitalism in its struggle against Communism? Of course this would involve some concessions on the part of the Labor government, the pace of socialist transformation would slacken, perhaps even a slight retreat would be necessary. But all this would be only temporary. As soon as external conditions permitted, the road to socialism could be resumed.

Somehow this seemed to ring a bit false. It was too simple an explanation. The Tories were all too pleased with Bevin. How different the situation would be if it could be shown that British foreign policy rested on false assumptions. An entirely new foreign policy could then be introduced. With reduced military expenditures and

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long term trade agreements with eastern Europe, the need for a halt along the British road to socialism would not arise.

At a time when I was increasingly preoccupied with these thoughts, the chance I had been waiting for came. I was awarded a scholarship to study in Czechoslovakia for nine months. At last I would have the opportunity to see first hand what life was like in eastern Europe. I could find out for myself whether the fears of the Labor government were justified.

I left for Czechoslovakia looking for answers to the following questions: Were the people terrorized? Were they free to worship as they liked? What was their attitude towards war? Were living conditions as bad as one heard? Was Czechoslovakia exploited by Russia? What was the position of the student?

I arrived in Prague on January 28, 1949. My first impression was a mixture of disappointment and relief. I found neither the terror of which my conservative friends warned, nor the socialist paradise proclaimed by others. What in fact I did find was an old, picturesque, yet surprisingly modern and up-to-date city, with life about the same as anywhere in the west. People were not terrorized. They did not shun foreigners. On the contrary, they spoke with foreigners openly and were anxious to learn about life in America. They did not talk in whispers and glance over their shoulders to see if anyone was listening.

After a few days, I was settled in a students' *kolej*, an ultra-modern, extremely comfortable hall of residence accommodating 250. An outstanding feature of life in the *kolej* was the fact that well over one third of the other students were foreigners too. Besides one or two from France, Italy, America, Canada, Great Britain, and Scandinavia, there were 20 or 30 from Bulgaria, Albania, and Yugoslavia. Here was a chance to learn not only about Czechoslovakia but also about the other countries of eastern Europe.

Several days before leaving for Prague, I read in the English press that all radios in Czechoslovakia were to be confiscated. How the boys laughed when they heard that! Not long after my arrival, I bought a radio and began to listen to the news every day from the Voice of America and the B.B.C. About one out of every four boys has his own set, and many listen to foreign language broadcasts from America and England. It is thanks to the Voice of America and the foreign press that I learned of the "mass arrests" and "terror" reported to have taken place recently in Prague, for in fact nothing of the kind occurred. Life in Prague was normal. People went about their business as usual. If anyone was terrorized at the time, it was probably the announcer over the Voice of America.

Were people allowed to worship as they pleased? Within a few

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minutes' walk of my *kolej* there are several churches, so I had ample opportunity to see how free religious worship is. On Sundays the churches are packed. Many of them have religious literature on sale. It is a common sight to see nuns and monks in their coarse habits and leather sandals walking about the streets. For the ordinary churchgoer, the friction between Church and State is remote indeed.

A striking feature of life in Czechoslovakia is the absence of war psychosis among the people. They are so absorbed with such things as the progress of the five year plan, the latest improvements in the clothing and food situation, and voluntary work brigades, that they find little time for pessimistic war talk. That feeling of helplessness and despair so often met with at home is non-existent. The Czechs have confidence in the future and are determined to prevent another war. They do not sit back, resigned to the coming of a war beyond their control. They realize that they, the ordinary people, are in the final analysis the decisive factor in the preservation of peace. Peace to every one of them is vital because they know that only through another war can their new won freedom and security be taken away.

What about living conditions and the economic situation generally? An important feature of life in Czechoslovakia is that the people help determine and control their own tomorrow. They are no longer at the mercy of economic forces, subject to the uncertainties of the business cycle. Investment, production, and employment are now planned several years in advance. Living in Czechoslovakia, one cannot help feeling the tremendous role of "the plan." There are no more doubts as to what tomorrow will bring. Everyone knows that the plan, which is formulated and carried out by the people themselves, means more and cheaper food, a higher standard of living, and a more cultured life. In the course of a few months, I saw great improvements in the food and clothing situation. First came the introduction of the "free market," offering both food and clothing at prices considerably higher than those of rationed goods, then a gradual reduction of these prices. A recent cut in prices has knocked as much as 40 percent off certain articles. There is no need to worry about unemployment. There is plenty of work for all.

Russian domination—this is one of the loudest cries of anti-socialists and probably the one with the least foundation. In more than nine months in Czechoslovakia I have seen not one Soviet soldier. And it is not because I didn't look for them; I was anxious to meet some and practice my Russian. This was a striking contrast to London to which I returned for a fortnight in June. American sailors and soldiers were everywhere. Piccadilly Circus looked like Times Square at the height of the war. A glance at the latest ECE report, *Economic Survey of Europe in 1948*, shows clearly the falsity

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of stories in the American press that the Soviet Union exploits its eastern European neighbors.* Suggestions that the Soviet Union is dominating and strangling the cultural life of Czechoslovakia are equally without foundation. If anything, the Soviet Union has had the opposite effect. Since liberation, national culture has flourished as never before. The Czechoslovakian film industry is making tremendous strides. Even Slovakia has now its own film industry. In western Europe the trend is in the other direction. The French film industry has been forced to curtail production because of American competition. A similar situation is developing in Britain. Gradually American films, magazines, and short stories are penetrating these countries to such an extent that many of the forms of national artistic and cultural expression are being forced into bankruptcy.

What is the position of the student? Here two points stand out. First, the fact that higher education is open and free to all. The opportunity for each child to benefit from an advanced education is limited only by ability. No one who is fitted for university is handicapped financially. All students receive monthly grants from the government, inexpensive accommodations in student residences, free medical care and recreation, and many other privileges and facilities. Second, after February 1948, workers' schools were established where men and women of all ages take one year of intensive preparatory courses before undergoing the university entrance examination. I spent several weekends at one of these schools housed in an old castle a few hours from Prague. There were 120 students aged 18 to 36. They had been chosen by their fellow workers. More than 1000 students have finished the first year's course and are now enrolled in universities throughout the country. This year the number attending these schools is to be doubled.

The workers' schools help fill a gap which necessarily exists while the educational system is being reorganized. In the past, most boys and girls dropped out of school a year or two before they reached the college level, because they had to go out and earn money for the family. Under the new system, equal opportunity is provided for all, the sole criterion being scholastic ability. These special schools were established, first, to speed up the flow of poorer children into the universities, and second, to help supply the trained personnel required for the success of the five-year plan. After the new educational system has been working a few years and children, irrespective of their background, have an equal chance to finish school and prepare for entry into university, the need for such schools will no longer exist.

What I have seen in Czechoslovakia gives me the feeling that I

*See the article on this report in *MR*, Sept. 1949, especially pp. 156-157.—Ed.

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have had a glimpse into the future. Here are the beginnings of socialism. Much of the old still remains, but already signs of the new life are visible. Even a change in the people can be observed. The disappearance of economic uncertainty and the improved material position of the Czechoslovakian people are having their effect. A new attitude toward work is developing. People no longer feel that if they work harder, others will benefit at their expense; they see in tangible form that increased effort, rationalization, reduction of costs, and higher production mean direct increases in their standard of living. That old form of competition where one person must succeed at the expense of another is rapidly disappearing. A new and friendly form of competition is replacing it. Not only individuals but also groups of individuals compete with one another. In this way the more advanced members of a group have a direct interest in helping their more backward teammates. To such people, war can mean only one thing, a reduction in their standard of living and a halt in their advance to a socialist society.

It is now quite clear to me that the assumptions upon which the Labor government bases its foreign policy are untenable. I have seen for myself that all talk about terror, lack of freedom, Soviet domination, and economic chaos are, in the case of Czechoslovakia, pure fabrication. I have found the situation here to be, if anything, the exact opposite. From this it is also clear that the British government's hostility to the Soviet Union and eastern Europe is not really an expression of the fears of those wishing to bring about socialism in Britain, but rather the real fears of those defending capitalism. The sooner the people of Britain realize this, the sooner will her economic crisis be solved and the road to socialism be resumed.

So I had not always believed in socialism. In fact my political outlook had once resembled rather closely that of the "recently arrived" American student. Despite a most "un-socialist" background, I managed in the course of three years to arrive at a socialist position. As I see it, there are three reasons for this change. The first is a relatively open and inquisitive American mind which sought an explanation and remedy for society's ills. The second is a theoretical and historical knowledge of socialism acquired from study of Russian and Soviet history in an atmosphere of academic objectivity. The third is the chance to see this theory at work in Czechoslovakia. Perhaps the "recently arrived" American student, too, will look back one day and wonder how it was ever possible not to believe in socialism.

(continued from inside front cover)

presentation and for the most part can be understood by people with no special training.

In last month's Notes from the Editors, we said that we were hoping to enclose with issues mailed out to subscribers material describing a new English book service—International Mail Order Service (North American Department), 52 Charing Cross Rd., London W.C. 2, England. Owing to the vagaries of the transatlantic mails, the material was received too late—one day too late, as it happened—and hence is included with this month's issue. Non-subscribers can get the information by dropping a card to the above address.

MR has no space for a regular book review section, but from time to time we will run articles about or based on books—new and old. Leo Huberman's "Eugene V. Debs: Uncompromising Revolutionary," based on Ray Ginger's recent biography of the great American socialist leader, is our first article of this type.

Our combination subscription and book offers (see back cover for details) have met with a favorable reception, and we are glad to say that we can continue them in force for some time longer. Those who are already subscribers are reminded that they can take advantage of these offers in renewing their subs. It will pay you to act now rather than wait until the last moment when your sub runs out; it is possible that the book offers will have lapsed by that time.

For the benefit of those who came in late, we reproduce the key policy paragraphs from our introductory editorial in Vol. I, No. 1:

We find completely unrealistic the view of those who call themselves socialists, yet imagine that socialism can be built on an international scale by fighting it where it already exists. This is the road to war, not to socialism. On the other hand, we do not accept the view that the USSR is above criticism, simply because it is socialist. We believe in, and shall be guided by, the principle that the cause of socialism has everything to gain and nothing to lose from a full and frank discussion of shortcomings, as well as accomplishments, of socialist countries and socialist parties everywhere.

We shall follow the development of socialism all over the world, but we want to emphasize that our major concern is less with socialism abroad than with socialism at home. We are convinced that the sooner the United States is transformed from a capitalist to a socialist society, the better it will be not only for Americans but for all mankind.

Reminder: the Einstein leaflets "Why Socialism?" are available at \$1 for 35 copies.

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